

Armtech Vendor

This scenario was prepared by the Center for Ethics, Responsibilities, and Values,
College of Saint Catherine, St. Paul, Minn.

Position One: Tell Her

You are Aaron Smith, manager of technical operations for High Plains Communications. Beyond your normal responsibilities, you have been asked to take major responsibility for a large purchase of unusual equipment for your group. The initial order is for \$250,000 and much more is likely to be ordered.

Normally a bidding process involving a central directory of approved vendors would be used, but because of the unusual nature of this material, a direct approach was made to Armtech, a fast-growing young company with a solid reputation in its field.

The sales representative for Armtech, Henry Buben, begins meeting with you, always taking you out to lunch as his guest and then returning to your office. Before long, he shares some ski tickets for a couple of nice mountain resorts nearby.

One day, as negotiations near a conclusion, you and Henry are casually chatting about your families and Henry takes an interest in your oldest daughter's plans. She is about to graduate from college and is job hunting. Henry says, "Send her over. I've got an opening that might be a good fit for her."

Would you tell your daughter to give Henry a call?

Yes. The responsibility for negotiating with Armtech is mine, but the final decision will be with several people. As a result, there is no chance of our being persuaded by Armtech's employment of my daughter and thus there is no conflict of interest.

Everybody gets their start by meeting someone who can help them. There is nothing wrong with my daughter meeting someone connected to my business. If she is not qualified they will not hire her.

Position Two: Don't Tell Her

You are Aaron Smith, manager of technical operations for High Plains Communications. Beyond your normal responsibilities, you have been asked to take major responsibility for a large purchase of unusual equipment for your group. The initial order is for \$250,000 and much more is likely to be ordered.

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Would you tell your daughter to give Henry a call?

No. Henry's attempt to win my favor by employing my daughter is part of a continuing attempt to persuade me by buying me things like meals and ski tickets. If he is willing to break the rules in the process of negotiation he may not be the contractor we want. Using my professional connections for personal gain is immoral and wrong.

If my daughter did get a job there and we chose to give the contract to someone else, it could be damaging to her career, since they might lose interest in employing her.